

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 SS-15 NSC-05
SCA-01 DHA-02 IO-13 PRS-01 PA-01 USIE-00 INRE-00
CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 /058 W
-----151604Z 049489 /46

O R 151510Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2086
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
AMEMBASSY VIENNA
USMISSION US BERLIN
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS
USUN NY 517

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRAGUE 0421

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SOPN, PINS, CZ, CSCE, SHUM
SUBJECT: PROTEST TO ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER RE HOFFMAN DETENTION

REF STATE 032778

1. SUMMARY: ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER VEJVODA RECEIVED ME TODAY
ON SHORT NOTICE FOR WHAT PROVED TO BE AN UPBEAT DISCUSSION OF THE
FEBRUARY 12-13 DETENTION OF NY TIMES CORRESPONDENT PAUL HOFFMAN.
AFTER LISTENING TO MY REVIEW OF FACTS SURROUNDING HOFFMAN'S
REMOVAL FROM TRAIN AND OVERNIGHT STAY AT THE CESKE VELENICE
RAILWAY STATION, VEJVODA DREW UPON WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS A GOC
"PRESLIMINARY REPORT" WHICH WAS ALMOST TOTALLY AT VARIANCE WITH
THE FACTS AS SET FORTH BY HOFFMAN, WHOM VEJVODA KNOWS PERSONALLY
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FROM HIS UN EXPERIENCES. VEJVODA MADE A NOTABLE EFFORT TO MINIMIZE
DAMAGE TO OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, SAYING CZECHOSLOVAKS "REGRET"
DIFFICULTIES STEMMING FROM THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL UPROAR OVER
CHARTER 77 AND HOPES USG CAN UNDERSTAND THE MOOD IN PRAGUE.
HE PLEDGED TO BRING MY STATEMENT TO ATTENTION OF GOC LEADERSHIP
IMMEDIATELY. VEJVODA DID NOT REFUSE TO ACCEPT AN EMBASSY NOTE
REVIEWING RECENT DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY US JOURNALISTS

GETLER (WAS POST), COLLITT (NBC NEWS),
AND HOFFMAN. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER EMBASSY HAD RECEIVED NO REPLY TO AMBASSADOR'S FEBRUARY 14 REQUEST TO CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER CHNOUPEK REGARDING THE HOFFMAN DETENTION, WE CALLED MFA EARLY FEBRUARY 15 TO INDICATE THAT EMBASSY WAS UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO MAKE IMPORTANT CALL ON THE MINISTRY AND ASKED FOR AN APPOINTMENT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE--IF NOT WITH THE MINISTER, THEN WITH ONE OF HIS DEPUTIES. MFA PROTOCOL QUICKLY ARRANGED A MEETING WITH ACTING MINISTER VEJVODA, WHO TOLD ME ON MY ARRIVAL AT HIS OFFICE THAT CHNOUPEK WHO HAD BEEN "TRULY ILL," LEAVES TODAY FOR A TRIP TO AFRICA (WE UNDERSTAND HE WILL BE VISITING SOMALIA AND YEMEN), VEJVODA STATED HE HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SEE ME ASAP.

3. I REVIEWED IN DETAIL THE FACTS OF THE HOFFMAN DETENTION AND RECALLED IN GENERAL THE RECENT HARASSMENT OF POST CORESPONDENT GETLER AND DETENTION OF NBC NEWS REPORTER COLLITT, STRESSING U.S. CONCERN OVER THEIR INABILITY TO CARRY OUT THEIR LEGITIMATE PROFESSIONAL DUTIES. I NOTED THAT EMBASSY STILL AWAITS REPORT ON DCM'S STRONG PROTEST FEB. 7 OVER TREATMENT OF COLLITT. PARTICULARLY EMPHASIZING THE UNACCEPTABILITY OF NOT EXTENDING COMMON COURTESIES TO HOFFMAN IN LIGHT OF HIS AGE, 64, I SAID HE HAD TO WALK THROUGH THE SNOW CARRYING HIS LUGGAGE AND TYPEWRITER TO TRY TO FIND A HOTEL. HIS REQUESTS FOR A TAXI AND ASSISTANCE IN FINDING ACCOMODATIONS WERE TURNED DOWN, AND HE HAD TO WALK. MOREOVER, USG WAS ESPECIALLY TROUBLED THAT HOFFMAN HAD HIS NOTES TAKEN, WAS DENIED ACCESS TO A TELEPHONE TO CALL THE EMBASSY AND THAT MFA TURNED ASIDE OUR REPEATED REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION
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ON HOFFMAN LATE FEBRUARY 12 AND UNTIL AFTERNOON FEBRUARY 13. I SAID USG FINDS CZECHOSLOVAK HANDLING OF THE HOFFMAN MATTER AND RECENT PATTERN OF JOURNALIST HARASSMENT TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE AND A CLEAR VIOLATION OF THE CSCE FINAL ACT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 PRAGUE 0421

INSTEAD OF IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS, GOC WAS MAKING IT
IMPOSSIBLE FOR OUR JOURNALISTS TO PURSUE THE
LEGITIMATE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL DUTIES.

4. VEJVODA EMPHASIZED HE WAS NOT IN POSITION TO GIVE
ME ANYTHING BUT A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WHAT HAD
HAPPENED TO HOFFMAN. HIS REPORT, HE SAID, WAS
CONTRADICTORY TO MY VERSION, AND INDICATED THAT
CZECH BORDER GUARDS HAD, IN FACT, OFFERED HOFFMAN
USE OF A TELEPHONE AND HELP IN GETTING A TAXI AND
LOCATING HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS. BUT, HE ALLEGED,
HOFFMAN WAS "ANGRY" AND "REFUSED ALL KINDS OF HELP."

5. I COUNTERED THAT IT MADE NO SENSE THAT A 64-YEAR
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OLD MAN WOULD REFUSE TAXI AND INSTEAD WANT TO WALK
THROUGH THE SNOW TO FIND A HOTEL ROOM AT NIGHT. I
HOPED THAT AFTER ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED AT LEAST GOC
WILL QUICKLY RETURN NOTES AND OTHER PAPERS TO BOTH
COLLITT AND HOFFMAN TAKEN DURING THEIR RESPECTIVE
DETENTIONS. VEJVODA EVIDENCED INCREASING DOUBTS
ABOUT THE GOC VERSION OF THE HOFFMAN AFFAIR AND APPEARED
INCREASINGLY CONCILIATORY AS MEETING PROGRESSED.

6. VEJVODA WISHED USG COULD UNDERSTAND THAT ALL GOC
AGENCIES "ARE VERY SORRY" ABOUT CURRENT WESTERN MEDIA
ATTACKS AGAINST THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT. PERHAPS
SOME LOCAL OFFICIALS BECOME "OVERZEALOUS" IN
REACTING TO THESE PRESS ATTACKS. LAST YEAR, HE

SAID, GOC MADE MAJOR EFFORT TO IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS FOR FOREIGN JOURNALISTS BY EASING VISA ISSUANCE, FACILITATING TRAVEL, ETC. THE RESULT IS ONLY A WORSENING OF CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS WITH THE FOREIGN PRESS--"THROUGH NO FAULT OF OUR OWN." HE CLAIMED ALL CURRENT WESTERN REPORTAGE ON CZECHOSLOVAK DEVELOPMENTS WAS LACKING IN OBJECTIVITY.

7. I POINTED TO HOFFMAN'S FRONTPAGE ARTICLE IN FEBRUARY 11 INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE AS AN UNDENIABLY OBJECTIVE EFFORT TO PRESENT TO WESTERN READERS THE GOC VERSION OF CHARTER 77. VEJVODA BACKED OFF, SAYING THIS ARTICLE WAS "THE FIRST ONE" TO REFLECT ANY OBJECTIVITY. I THEN EXPRESSED HOPE THAT CZECHOSLOVAKIA WOULD SEE WISDOM OF OPENING NOT CLOSING DOORS TO JOURNALISTS SINCE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WAS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE FINAL ACT.

8. IN CONCLUDING OUR EXCHANGE, VEJVODA RECALLED ACQUAINTANCE WITH HOFFMAN AT THE UNITED NATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE "HAD TRIED TO BE OBJECTIVE THERE." HE STATED THAT HE WOULD BRING USG VIEWS IMMEDIATELY
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TO ATTENTION OF GOC LEADERS, WHO WERE AWAITING HIS REPORT, AND PROVIDE EMBASSY WITH MORE COMPLETE INFORMATION ON THE HOFFMAN CASE SUBSEQUENTLY. HE HOPED FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS.
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